

Religion and Democracy in Europe and the Arab World

Event: International Conference

Date: November 29-30, 2012

Place: Lebanese American University, Byblos, Lebanon

Organisation: Adyan Foundation and KAS Amman

Program Overview

Thursday, November 29

Opening Session

Dr. Nayla Tabbara

Director of Cross Cultural Studies
Department
Adyan Foundation

Prof. Joseph Jabbara

President
Lebanese American University, Byblos

Fr. Prof. Fadi Daou

Chairman
Adyan Foundation

H.E. Hassan Diab

Ministry for Higher Education

First Panel: Religion and Democracy: Redefining the Relation from European and Arab Perspectives

Panel Chair

Dr. Makram Ouaiss

Chair of Department of Social Sciences
Lebanese American University, Byblos

Speakers

Dr. Hadi Adanali

Senior Advisor
Office of Prime Minister of Turkey

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Prof. Muhammad al Muhammadi

Director
Research Center at Cairo University
Freedom and Justice Party

Dr. Michel D. Dreissen

Assistant Professor
Political Science and International
Affairs
John Cabot University, Italy

HE Hassan Abu Nimah

Former Ambassador of Jordan
Advisor to Prince Hassan Bin Talal

Discussion

Second Panel: Democracy in the Scope of Religions

Panel Chair

Fr. Prof. Fadi Daou

Chairman
Adyan Foundation

Speakers

Prof. Muhammad A. Sharkawi

Professor and Head of Department of
Islamic Philosophy and Comparative
Religion
Cairo University

Rev. Archimandrite Nikodemos
Anagnostopoulos

PhD Candidate at Heythrop College
University of London

Shaykh Dr. Chafic Jradi

Director
Sapiental Knowledge Institute

Dr. Radwan Masmoudi

President
Center for the Study of Islam and
Democracy

Discussion

Third Panel: Religion in the Scope of Secular Democracies

Panel Chair

Dr. Tamirace Fakhoury

Assistant Professor
Department of Social Sciences
Lebanese American University, Byblos

Speakers

Prof. Wolfram Reiss

Professor of Religious Studies
University of Vienna

Prof. Wajih Kanso

Professor of Philosophy
Lebanese University

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zayd

Lecturer in Law
Al Jinan University
President of the Court of Sidon
legitimate Sunni

Ms. Fatima Tofighi

PhD Candidate
Glasgow University

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Discussion
November 30, 2012

Fourth Panel: Religious State versus Civil State?

Panel Chair

Prof. Harald Suermann

Director
Institute of Missiology
Missio, Germany

Speakers

Prof. Ridwan as Sayyed

Professor of Islamic Studies
Lebanese University

Mr. David Warren

PhD Candidate
University of Manchester, UK

Prof. Farag Elkamel

Professor of Sociology and
Communication
Cairperson at Cairo University

Mr. Kassem Qassir

Executive Director
Shou'oun Janoubiyya

Discussion

Fifth Panel: Opportunity or Threat for Interreligious and International Relations

Panel Chair

Prof. Mohammad Sharkawi

Head of Islamic Philosophy and
Comparative Religion Department
Cairo University

Speakers

Judge Abbas Halabi

Lebanese National Dialogue Committee
General Secretary of the Arab Group
for Muslim Christian Dialogue

Dr. Abdallah Shamri

Representative of the Center of Turkish
Studies, Riyadh

Prof. Amel Grami

Professor of Arabic Literature
Chairperson
Mannouba University

Dr. Stacey Gutgowski

Lecturer Conflict & Post Conflict
Studies
Kings' College London

Discussion

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Panel Chair

Fr. Prof. Fadi Daou

Chairman

Adyan Foundation

Speakers

Dr. Selim Sayegh

Director

Cadmus Center, Sagesse University
Former Minister of Social Affairs in
Lebanon

Member of the Political Bureau of
Lebanese Kataeb Party

Prof Ajmi Lourimi

Vice President

Ennahda Party, Tunis

Prof. Stefan Schreiner

Professor of Religious Studies

Tuebingen University, Germany

Coordinator at European Abrahamic
Forum

Prof. Massoud Daher

Professor of History

Lebanese University

Discussion

Seventh Panel: Value-Based versus Identity-Based Politics? The Democratic Role of the Public Sphere

Panel Chair

Dr. Selim Sayegh

Director

Cadmus Center, Sagesse University
Former Minister of Social Affairs in
Lebanon

Member of the Political Bureau of
Lebanese Kataeb Party

Speakers

Ms Maria Zandt

Resident Representative

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
Amman Office

Prof. Mouchir Aoun

Professor of Philosophy

Lebanese University

Prof. George Tamer

Professor and Chair of Oriental Philology
and Islamic Studies, FAU Erlangen-
Nuernberg, Germany

Discussion

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Introduction

During the Arab Spring the topic of religion and politics has increasingly come into the focus of the public debate - regionally as well as internationally. Whilst various experts emphasize that the current developments in the Arab world have a great chance to transform Islamist movements into democratic parties that are compatible with democratic constitutions, others point to the danger of a reinforcement of undemocratic political systems.

In light of these developments and the ongoing debate Adyan Foundation, the Lebanese American University, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Amman organized an international conference at the Lebanese American University in Byblos on November 29-30, 2012, to discuss the issue of religion and democracy in the Arab world with reference to the European experience and its increasing religious diversity.

First Panel: Religion and Democracy: Redefining the Relation from European and Arab Perspectives

During the first panel, speakers focused on the complex relation between religion and democracy. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, many Middle Eastern states are at the crossroad of changing their decades long repressive rule and start into a new era. As some powers within these states might try to keep the old regimes and its structures in power, implementing democratic systems based on the rule of law and human rights will be the main challenge. This, however, poses significant challenges to the states especially with regard to the role of religion in the Arab world. Whilst on the one hand one might argue religion should be part of a political

system for it to be comprehensive, on the other hand religion can easily be used as an argument to shape democracy in a way that it is compatible with the respective religious principles – the so called “religious democracy”. Although many scholars and politicians point to the differences of “Christian Democracy” and “Muslim Democracy” it has been emphasized that they have to share essential characteristics and values such as justice, equality, freedom, rule of law etc. in order to be called democracy; no matter if the leading party has a religious or a secular background.

Second Panel: Democracy in the Scope of Religions

The rise of Islamic movements took place in the 1970s, not only in the Middle East but across the world. At the same time an increase of democracies was observed which has been described by Huntington as the ‘third wave of democratization’. Over time however, former democratic states became repressive and corrupt, especially in the Arab world. In this context, the presentations discussed whether a state with an Islamic base can be called a ‘civil state’ in which per definition the people live, act, and are protected by the rule of law which guarantees equal rights for all citizens. The question led to the fundamental relation between religion, state, and democracy. The topic was raised whether a democracy should separate religion and state. Participants claimed that such separation does not necessarily lead to higher levels of democracy. With regard to the Middle East it has been explained that due to its history the Arab world has a religious background which forms the base of its cultural structure that comes together with Islamic legislations and sometimes oppressive practices. At the same time it is oriented towards the Western world and its

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secular state models. As a result, people of the Arab world find themselves in an antagonism between identity and attitude. The recent uprisings bring this contradiction back to the surface. In this context, participants emphasized that in order to establish democracies based on Islamic values, Islam itself needs to be reinterpreted to make it compatible with the 21st century and the demands of the people.

Third Panel: Religion in the Scope of Secular Democracies

Especially in times of political and economic tension voices can be found speaking about clashes between religions and cultures that are easily represented as the source of conflict. In light of this background, it was stressed that the Western interpretations of democracy are not always compatible with the Islamic world as the Western definitions are often too limited to take into consideration the various beliefs and practices of other religions and cultures. The question about the Muslim veil in France is an example of this limitation of the Western democracy model for religious, mainly Muslim, diversity and its values. Yet, in this context speakers pointed out that religion can also help to integrate minorities in society as it can offer orientation and identity. Additionally, religious groups are often well organized, can generate social capital stabilizing communities, and integrate religious or ethnic groups in society.

With regard to the Middle East, and the various former non Islamic states, the Arab Spring has significantly changed the political landscape. While Islamic parties were not participating in the demonstrations from the beginning they, however, won the majority in parliament in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Yemen. After being repressed

for decades they have now been confronted with a new political task. As they have not had a specific agenda in countries still influenced by the political culture of previous regimes, Islamic movements find themselves in a impasse between religious principles and the adoption of secular features in the economic and political system. Speakers emphasized that not only politically but also intellectually large parts of the Muslim movements are still closely linked to traditional ideas. This becomes clear not only in the Arab world but also in non Muslim states. Progresses could be made, according to the participants, by a more modern interpretation of Islam.

Day 2

Fourth Panel: Religious State versus Civil State?

With the success of the Islamic parties in various Arab states the fears of religious minorities increased that their freedom and rights will diminish. More and more scholars therefore encourage new ideas on how to deal with the changing political settings and the newly gained power of Islamic parties and how to find a balance, respectively new political models, between secular and sectarian political ideas. In this context the concept of the 'civil state' has gained new importance in the discussion. Especially in Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood has claimed to promote a civil state the discussion of its definition and compatibility with Islam has flourished. A civil state can, according to the Issam Fares Center, be defined as a state preserving the rights of all citizens regardless their 'religious, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic belongings. It is based on equality in rights and duties, respects the freedom of belief and Human Rights, with laws and constitution as its only reference'. Islamic movements have no unified position with regard to the concept of the civil state.

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While the Salafists refuse the concept of the civil state, the Muslim Brotherhood favors it while at the same time considering Islam as the basis. Shiite parties such as Hezbollah do not have a clear position concerning a state model.

Fifth Panel: Islamist Regimes after the Arab Uprising: Opportunity or Threat for Interreligious and International Relations?

Since the Arab Spring the question of the compatibility of Islamic states and democracy has gained increasing attention in the West. The most 'Islamized' states are Saudi Arabia and Iran, with the latter one being a theocratic state. The raise of the Islamic Muslim Brotherhood throughout the region has, to some extent, posed a challenge to the Saudi monopoly of political Islam. Additionally, the idea that democratization has to develop along the Western secular model has changed. Instead, other ways of democratization or democratic political systems compatible with the Arab culture are found acceptable – in the Arab world as well as in the West – under the condition that certain rights are secured. Speakers emphasized, a historic change can be witnessed as both, the West as well as the East are more 'open to openness' which should be used for the best – from both sides. Moreover, speakers pointed out that it is of utmost importance that decision makers recognize the system of values within a state, respectively the values that matter to the people. The Arab Spring for instance was triggered by modern values. The Enhadda party, however, seems to miss out certain new values and to focus too much on their traditional ideas while neglecting the modern change within society. In general, Islamist parties today seem to often contradict their own values.

Sixth Panel: Religious Pluralism and Inclusive Democracies in Contemporary Europe and the Arab World

Various European countries witnessed an increase in religious and cultural pluralization as well as a socio-political diversification of society. As a result, religion and culture have started to play a bigger role in the political debate, especially Islam. Therefore, the variety of religions should also be considered in the education sector. In Germany for instance, various states have started to implement Islamic religious studies in their school curricula as a regular subject. Also in the field of higher education, the study of different religions finds more and more consideration. Speakers emphasized that this is an important step in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. An example of a state in which various sectarian conflicts in the past have led to a sectarian political system representing various religious groups is Lebanon. However, the political system in Lebanon rather serves individual leadership and personal interests than promoting the pluralistic society. As a result, Lebanese people identify themselves with tribes or communities instead of the state as a unit. Yet, a secular state would jeopardize the control over their personal interests and power position. The vulnerable social scale in Lebanon is unable to preserve stability and sovereignty with regard to the regional and international circumstances which threatens the countries future. Thus, speakers emphasized that it is not enough to have various religious groups politically represented if the concept of pluralism is not implemented in society and only used by the political elite for its advantages.

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Seventh Panel: Value Based versus Identity Based Politics? The Democratic Role of the Public Sphere

While religion is an open topic in the Arab world many Europeans, such as Germans, rather try to avoid the topic in the private sphere. When the topic reaches the (Western) political debate it is sensitive topic and often brings up highly critical questions. Some states say that politics and religion should be completely separated which also includes the avoidance of religious symbols in public places such as schools. A reason for this divide is the view that states on a religious base, tend to repress minorities and can easily turn into dictatorships. Democracies have to ensure religious plurality. However, it can be argued that mankind needs the guidelines for humanity given by religion. The German CDU for instance was founded after the WW II and the cruelties of the Nazi regime as a democratic and value based party. It is not a religious party in the common understanding, but a party that bases its politics on the values of the Christian view of humanity that is universally comprehensible and applicable and includes values such as equality, justice, social responsibility etc. As the parties that form the post-revolutionary governments in the Arab countries are Islamist, many people in the Middle East as well as worldwide are concerned whether these new regimes will respect the values of humanity. In this context, it has been emphasized that a strong civil society, able to demand it's rights can only flourish if religion does not control the public sphere. Otherwise people are hindered to develop their demands because their ideas might be undermined by religious views.

Closing session

The conference closed with the words of the organizers and funders thanking all participants for their efforts. The conference has been evaluated as a big success which was especially due to the openness of the participants and the fruitful discussions.